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### Habitat for Learning

SU and ESF students rehab a city house for a family

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Contributing writer

Students from Syracuse University and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry are doing more this year than volunteering to help with Habitat for Humanity projects.

Through a partnership with Habitat for Humanity International and KeyBank, the student chapter of Habitat for Humanity is sponsoring and rehabilitating its own house on the city's South Side.

The students are in charge of the design, carpentry and landscaping of a two-story house at 134 Annetta St. The project is being used as a learning lab, where students from SU and SUNY ESF can learn more about the neighborhood and their respective fields.

The house renovation also is the centerpiece of a one-credit course through SU's College of Arts and Sciences, called "Habitat for Humanity and Modern Housing Issues." Students in the course learn about the history of Habitat for Humanity and issues related to housing, such as how a family may qualify for low-income housing and more.

The course requires that each student do 35 hours of service work at the house. There are five students enrolled this semester.

"We realized it was a great educational opportunity for people to get

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involved," said Kimberly Gugino, president of the student Habitat chapter.

After providing years of volunteer service to Habitat projects in the city and to projects in Florida and South Carolina during spring break, the students decided it was time to start their own project to

get students out of the university area and into the community.

On Saturday mornings and afternoons, about 16 students work on improving the house's ventilation system, and installing roofing, vinyl siding, a dormer and a third bedroom.

The vacant house, which is expected to be finished by April 20, will go to Jimelle Richards and her three children.

"We were just really driven by that vision of repairing and fixing one of the many houses in Syracuse that needs to be repaired," Gugino said.

**To make** its dream of sponsoring a house come true, the group had to apply for a Vision Fund grant from the university, which required their project to fit a theme of diversity. They received \$15,000 from the grant. The group needs to raise an additional \$12,000.

"This whole project has been a wonderful seed for all kinds of wonderful things that have flowered from it," said Larry Elin, the group adviser from SU and associate professor at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

The house is more than just a building project, Elin said. Professors can bring their classes to the house to study about anthropology, political science, geography and social work.

The group holds lunchtime lectures on Saturdays when the students work. Three professors have given lectures since construction began Sept. 28 on topics such as the history of the community, construction safety and urban housing.

**Paul Walsh**, the vice president of construction and a student at SUNY ESF, has been involved with Habitat since he was a student at Christian Brothers Academy. Walsh, who is a senior construction management major, spends about 25 hours a week working on paperwork and researching vendors for the renovation project. He also spends time working on the house itself.

"I like service learning," Walsh said. "It's just really rewarding to see you can provide a decent home for a family."

This is the first project of its kind in the Syracuse area, said Suzanne Williams, executive director of the Syracuse Habitat for Humanity. Some school-sponsored houses have been done around the country, but nothing has happened in Syracuse before, she said.

"They have put together a whole professional program for rehabilitating this house," Williams said.

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